



United States Senator  
**Richard Shelby**  
REPORTS TO ALABAMA



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**2000 CENSUS: DATA TOO IMPORTANT TO BE  
RELEGATED TO ESTIMATION**

In a little over a year, the U.S. Commerce Department will send out the first questionnaires for Census 2000. These forms will ask basic questions about age, gender, and marital status—as well as address more detailed subjects such as occupation, education, transportation, and housing. Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution requires an “actual enumeration” of the population every 10 years. While this process may seem like a minor responsibility for today’s enormous federal bureaucracy, the census actually serves a vital role in the functioning of our democracy. Census figures form the underlying foundation for the smooth transition of power in Congressional elections every two years, as well as the regional shifts in that power over time.

The most obvious and well-known use of census data is the reapportionment and redistricting of the House of Representatives. After each decennial census, the Census Bureau reapportions Congressional seats amongst the 50 states according to how the population has shifted in the last 10 years. Individual state legislatures then use the census information to create new districts or redraw existing ones in order to equalize the number of individuals each Congressman represents.

Federal, state, and local governments use census data for a wide variety of tasks. Each year, more than

\$100 billion in federal funds are allocated to state and local governments based on this information. Programs as diverse as food stamps, subway systems, educational loans, and civil rights enforcement are funded according to census figures. In addition, local officials rely on this data to plan for growth in their communities and decide where to locate new schools, libraries, hospitals or other government services.

Because the decisions made on the basis of this data touch every aspect of our lives and, ultimately, affect all Americans, it is extremely important that the Census Bureau obtain an accurate census count. The Census Bureau estimates that it missed more than 4 million individuals in the 1990 census of 250 million people. Despite Congressional objections, the Clinton Administration has proposed using statistical sampling as a means of increasing the accuracy of Census 2000. Under this proposal, the Census Bureau would only obtain responses to its mail-in questionnaires from 90 percent of the population. Scientists would then use the data from those responses to mathematically predict the characteristics of the other 10 percent of the population, and all of the data would be integrated to form one final set of statistics. Previously, door-to-door interviews of non-responsive households were used to compile a com-

plete population profile. In response to a lawsuit filed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and other House members, a panel of three federal judges recently declared the Administration’s sampling plan unlawful. The Supreme Court has agreed to rule on the case early next year.

Any undercount of the population is a very serious matter which we must work hard to eliminate. However, statistical sampling is not an appropriate solution to this problem. Aside from sampling’s vulnerability to political manipulation, any estimation of demographic characteristics would violate the Constitution’s requirement for an enumeration. The Framers of the Constitution included this provision to prevent states from inflating their population figures to gain additional seats in the House of Representatives. If the Administration is allowed to proceed with its plan, we will be inviting the exact temptations that these wise men sought to guard against. Instead of settling for a 90 percent response rate, we should focus our efforts on education and awareness campaigns to achieve the maximum participation possible.

The resources and time of the federal government should be used to compile the actual responses of actual citizens—not to generate a best guess

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